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Baker digs into CIA dilemma

'No decision'
on changing
nomination

From Chicago Tribune wires

WASHINGTON—Robert M. Gates met with new White House chief of staff Howard H. Baker Jr. Monday amid reports that Gates will withdraw from consideration as CIA director because criticisms by a presidential panel eroded his support on Capitol Hill.

Reagan's national security adviser, Frank C. Carlucci, also took part in the 30-minute meeting.

Marlin Fitzwater, deputy White House press secretary, said that when Gates departed "no decision" had been made on whether President Reagan will pursue his nomination.

The Washington Post, citing administration and congressional sources it did not name, reported in Monday's editions that Gates had decided "without much prodding" to withdraw his name.

Gates held key CIA posts during the period in which weapons were shipped secretly to Iran and money apparently was diverted to Nicaraguan rebels, called contras.

The Gates nomination was among the first issues Baker confronted on his initial day as chief of staff. He was chosen by Reagan on Friday to replace Donald T. Regan, whose handling of the Iran-contra crisis was sharply criticized in the report by the presidentially appointed Tower Board.

Senate Republican Leader Bob Dole [R., Kan.] said Sunday that Gates' nomination "could be in some difficulty" if brought to a confirmation vote soon after the Tower report, and other senators have been even more negative about Gates' chances in the current climate.

Before Gates' meeting with Baker and Carlucci Monday, Fitzwater said: "The President stands behind his nomination of Robert Gates to be CIA director. I have seen the stories about Robert Gates' consideration of this matter, but I don't have any

direct knowledge of his position.

"It's a matter for Robert Gates to decide. The President made the nomination and he thinks it's a good one, and I won't have any comment on that."

Reagan, meeting with his Cabinet Monday to discuss the Tower panel's report, refused to answer when asked by reporters whether Gates had in fact requested that his name be withdrawn.

Asked if he had been irritated by the commission's findings, Reagan replied: "No, I'm disturbed about being pressured to talk about it now. . . . No questions, we've got to get on with the Cabinet meeting."

David Holliday, a spokesman for Sen. David Boren [D., Okla.], chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said the panel, which is reviewing the nomination, had not been informed of any decision by Gates. Holliday said the committee had a meeting scheduled for Wednesday, but had not decided whether to call Gates, a member of the Tower Board or some other witness.

Holliday said that as recently as Friday Gates was sending the committee documents designed to mitigate concerns about his role in a 1985 plan for a joint U.S.-Egyptian invasion of Libya.

The committee spokesman said the material was presented as evidence that Gates had argued against such an invasion in discussions with William J. Casey, then director of the CIA. He said the committee members had not had

time to read the material.

Gates, 43, was picked to head the CIA after Casey resigned in December because of brain cancer.

With Reagan preparing to address the nation this week on the Iran-contra affair, Baker Monday conducted his first staff meeting, which Fitzwater described as "humorous, but to the point."

He said Baker promised "no wholesale firings, no wholesale requests for resignations."

However, Fitzwater said, White House counsel J. Peter Wallison

has indicated a desire to leave, and that Wallison will be replaced by A.V. Culvahouse, a partner with Baker in the Washington law firm of Vinson & Elkins.

Wallison had been involved in coordinating Reagan's responses to various investigations into the Iran-contra affair.

Fitzwater said that while Baker assured White House staff members there would be no shake-up, Baker "would have private consultations later if there was any need to discuss a job change."